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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VIENNA 002944

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/SE, EUR/ERA, EUR/AGS - VIKMANIS-KELLER

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SUBJECT: TURKISH EU ACCESSION: CYPRIOT FOREIGN MINISTER

VISITS AUSTRIA -- "NO VETO"

REF: VIENNA 2827

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Carol van Voorst.
Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On August 31, EconPolCouns met with the Foreign Ministry's Assistant Secretary-level Director for Southern European Affairs, Clemens Koja, to receive a readout of the Cypriot Foreign Minister Georgios Iacovou's August 30 visit to Vienna and to discuss Turkey's accession talks with the EU. Koja reiterated that Austria would not "veto" the start of the Turkish talks on October 3. Austria opposed a link between Cyprus and Turkey, he said. Koja said Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik's letter to the British Foreign Secretary -- the text of which appeared in the Austrian wire service almost immediately -- restated the Austrian view that, while the talks could lead to full Turkish membership in the EU, the negotiating framework should specify alternatives if full membership were not possible. However, Austria had very little support for this position -- Plassnik told the Austrian press that the tally was "one against 24" -- and would drop it if this remained the case. Koja said Austria had no desire to link Croatia and Turkey. End Summary.

Talks will Take Place October 3

¶2. (C) Koja said Iacovou expressed frustration with Turkey's position on recognition of Cyprus. Nevertheless, Iacovou and Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik agreed, as they stated in a press conference, that they would not/not "veto" the start of Turkey's accession talks with the EU on October 3. Plassnik said publicly that Turkey would have to recognize Cyprus when it enters the EU, but "now we're talking about another issue -- the issue of the start of the (accession) talks." Koja noted that French statements seemed to be backtracking from a hard link between Turkish talks and recognition of Cyprus. He added that Iacovou had told Plassnik that the French statements were simply the result of the internal battle between President Chirac and Nicolas Sarkozy to show who could be tougher on Turkey.

¶3. (C) Talk of delaying the start of Turkey's accession talks was mere posturing, Koja opined. The December 17 agreement to set the date for the Turkish talks was a decision of the Heads of Government. There was no regular meeting of Heads of Government before October 3 (although the British were now floating the idea of an extraordinary meeting on September 24) and it would be almost unheard-of for Ministers to overturn a decision of their superiors. (Comment: this may or may not be true, but the fact that Koja took the trouble to spin out this scenario indicates that the Austrians are not thinking of derailing the talks. End Comment.)

Plassnik-Straw Letter: "include alternative or interim solutions"

¶4. (C) Koja gave us a copy of a letter FM Plassnik had sent to British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw on August 29 (text para 6 below). Koja said the letter simply restated Austria's position. In the letter, Plassnik argues that, "while negotiations may lead to full membership in the future," the negotiating framework for the Turkish accession talks should include specific wording on alternative outcomes should agreement on membership not be possible. Reiterating what he told us a week ago (reftel), Koja said there was very little support for the Austrian position in the EU. In fact, Plassnik has admitted as much. In the press conference with Iacovou, she said the Austrian view was "not broadly shared" among EU member states. She was even more explicit at the "Gymnich" meeting in Wales, telling the press, "In reality, it's oen against 24." Koja all but admitted that the purpose of the Austrian position -- which was a personal initiative of Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel -- was to address domestic

concerns about the possibility of Turkish accession. Only ten percent of Austrians approve of Turkish accession, and it was important to the Chancellor to show his constituency that he was reflecting their views. That said, it was less important for the Chancellor to achieve a change in the negotiating framework than for the public to know that he had tried. (It was therefore no surprise that the full text of Plassnik's letter appeared on the Austrian Press Agency (APA) wire service on August 30.) Koja said Austria had no intention of blocking the start of the Turkish talks because of this issue, and would "bow" to the majority view among EU countries. (Note: this does not mean that Plassnik's protestations that the objective should be to restore Europeans' confidence are false. End note.)

No Link to Croatia

15. (C) Koja was aware of British allegations of a cabal among some Central European countries to link the start of the Turkish talks to movement toward giving Croatia a date for talks. Koja said the British were mistaken about this. Austria and its neighbors were not coordinating their policies to the extent the British implied. They agreed, however, that Croatia was a prime candidate for EU membership, both for geostrategic reasons and for reasons of trade and commerce. Austria and like-minded countries believed that, while the Croatian government had spent a long time shielding Ante Gotovina from the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), it had reversed that position over a year ago and was now doing everything it could to meet ICTY demands. None of this had anything to do with Turkey, however, Koja asserted. In fact, it was the British who had recently floated a "deal" by which the British would work to obtain an ICTY certification of Croatian cooperation if Austria would agree to start the Turkish talks on October 3. Koja said Austria would not "play that game" -- for one thing, Austria thought there was sufficient movement toward reaching agreement in the EU to give Croatia a date for talks that it did not need a deal with the British. For another, Austria had already agreed that the Turkish talks would proceed. Finally, Austria had no desire to link the idea of Croatian accession to the EU, which was very popular in Austria, with Turkish accession -- which is not.

16. (U) Text of Plassnik-Straw Letter (original in English):

29 August 2005

Dear President, Dear Jack,

We will meet in Newport shortly to discuss enlargement at our informal meeting.

In the Austrian view, our shared objective over the next months will be to reconnect with Europeans, restore trust and thus resolve the current crisis of confidence. Much will depend on our visible and credible capacity to respond to the concerns of citizens, not least those expressed during the recent referenda. In particular, Europeans request greater clarity about the extent and pace of eventual future enlargements.

In this context, I would like to reiterate the Austrian position with regard to Turkey:

Austria has consistently expressed full support for the remarkable political and economic reform process under way in this important partner country. It is in the interest of both the Union and Turkey to start negotiations on an even closer relationship.

While negotiations may lead to full membership in the future, such negotiations cannot at this stage exclusively aim at full membership. They must include alternative or interim solutions should the Union not have the capacity to absorb new members or Turkey not meet all membership criteria. In our mind, this is the very essence of open-ended negotiations.

In substance, such an alternative or interim relationship would go considerably beyond the present association agreement. It would establish a specifically designed Turkish-European Community. While providing a more realistic medium-term objective for both Turkey and the EU member states, such a partnership would not exclude the perspective of full membership.

For Austria, the Union's absorption capacity, the open-endedness of negotiations with Turkey and a specific alternative to full membership are of the utmost importance.

As requested at our last Council meeting in July, these elements must definitely be more clearly reflected in the wording of the negotiating framework proposed by the European Commission which has to be adopted unanimously.
Best regards,

Ursula

End text.
Brown